

# Substance Use Trend

# Alert

February 2021

## Polysubstance Use Trends Across the Nation and Florida

Using drugs in combination is known as polysubstance use.<sup>1</sup> Polysubstance use can enhance the high or compensate for undesired effects of one drug by taking another.<sup>2</sup> Of particular concern are polysubstance use overdoses caused by opioids in combination with other opioids and/or other non-opioid drugs,<sup>1</sup> as opioid-involved polysubstance use is associated with an increased risk for overdose.<sup>2</sup> Opioid-involved polysubstance use includes the combinations of two or more substances like illicit fentanyl and heroin, illicit fentanyl and cocaine, heroin and methamphetamine, and prescription or illicit opioids and benzodiazepines.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, polysubstance use has been associated with poorer recovery outcomes (i.e. poorer treatment retention, higher rates of relapse and higher mortality rates) compared to mono-substance use.<sup>3</sup>

### Polysubstance Use in the U.S.

In the U.S., 80% of opioid-involved overdose deaths involved another substance in 2016.<sup>3</sup> Of these deaths, 78% involved another opioid, 21% involved cocaine, 11% involved alcohol, and 5% involved a psychostimulant other than cocaine.<sup>4</sup>

### Polysubstance Use in Florida

Polysubstance use in Florida has slowly been increasing over time with over 60% of poisoning deaths involving polysubstance use in 2018.<sup>5</sup> Indications of polysubstance use deaths occurred among 92.6% of oxycodone-related deaths, 99.5% of heroin-related deaths, 94.8% of fentanyl and fentanyl analogues-related deaths, 87.9% cocaine-related deaths and 95.9% of methamphetamine-related deaths in 2019.<sup>6</sup>

**Table 1.**

*Total Drug-Involved Deaths and Polysubstance Deaths, Florida, 2003-2018*

| Year | Any Drug Involved | Multiple Drugs Involved | % Multiple Drugs Involved |
|------|-------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| 2003 | 6,747             | 3,233                   | 47.9                      |
| 2004 | 7,113             | 3,609                   | 50.7                      |
| 2005 | 7,544             | 3,826                   | 50.7                      |
| 2006 | 7,729             | 4,019                   | 52.0                      |
| 2007 | 8,596             | 4,571                   | 53.2                      |
| 2008 | 8,536             | 4,854                   | 56.9                      |
| 2009 | 8,642             | 4,996                   | 57.8                      |
| 2010 | 8,957             | 5,143                   | 57.4                      |
| 2011 | 8,619             | 4,774                   | 55.4                      |
| 2012 | 8,329             | 4,451                   | 53.4                      |
| 2013 | 8,226             | 4,263                   | 51.8                      |
| 2014 | 8,583             | 4,626                   | 53.9                      |
| 2015 | 9,783             | 5,617                   | 57.4                      |
| 2016 | 11,908            | 7,335                   | 61.6                      |
| 2017 | 12,436            | 7,861                   | 63.2                      |
| 2018 | 12,075            | 7,426                   | 61.5                      |

Source: FDLE MEC, Drugs in Deceased Persons Report <sup>6</sup>

### Recommendations

Interventions have been implemented to target mostly opioid use, misuse, and addiction.<sup>2,8</sup> However, polysubstance use is present in the majority of deaths in Florida which could limit the impact of mono-substance focused interventions.<sup>2,8</sup> Interventions tailored to address polysubstance misuse should be developed and implemented to reduce drug-related overdoses and deaths in Florida. Additionally, the link between mental health and substance use is profound,<sup>2</sup> suggesting policies may need to expand mental health care accessibility for those who use drugs.<sup>2</sup> For more information, please visit the following websites:

**Additional Information Sources:**

[Polysubstance Use and Abuse: The Unique Treatment Needs of Polydrug Users](#)

[Center for Disease and Control: Polysubstance Use and Pregnancy](#)

[Polysubstance Abuse and Addiction: Signs, Symptoms, and How to Get Help](#)

**References:**

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